

From: [Scott Couch](#)
To: [Billington, Tracie;](#)
CC:
Subject: Fwd: Re: monte rio wastewater
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Attachments: [Part.001](#)

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>>> Dale Webster [REDACTED] 12/9/2006 1:48:49 PM >>>
Hello Scott
I thought I'd show you what the editors at the Press Democrat wrote for
how Monte Rio should deal with it's wastewater 6 years ago

Print this story
PROJECT 7 LIVES
Published on August 24, 2000
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PAGE: B6

Dale Webster -- who has surfed the Pacific Ocean for more than 9,000
days in a row -- deserves an award for perseverance. But not for his
surfing feat.

No, Webster deserves a medal for sitting through dozens of public
hearings in order to promote Project 7. At nearly every Board of Public
Utilities hearing on the regional wastewater problem, Webster was there,
holding a redwood seedling planted in a milk carton.
Webster preached to anyone who would listen the gospel of Project 7:
Planting groves of wastewater-sucking redwood trees would eliminate the
need for an expensive infrastructure project and improve the environment.

The BPU, in a mixture of admiration for Webster's perseverance and a
desire to see if the idea worked, allocated \$35,000 for an experimental
plot of trees. Come to find out, Webster was right. Kind of.

The trees, planted at Sonoma State University, do use a substantial amount of water. But the sheer number of trees required to absorb the amount of wastewater produced by Santa Rosa's system would mean covering hundreds of acres of oak lands with redwoods.

Still, a similar project is being tried in Graton, and other small communities could likely benefit from Project 7's approach. Webster deserves thanks for his commitment to this project. Surf on, dude.

SURFER WITH A PASSION FOR CLEANING UP WATER TREE-SOAKING IDEA SHOWS

PROMISE

Published on August 23, 2000

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BYLINE: MIKE McCOY

Staff Writer PAGE: B1

When Dale Webster paddled into the waves off the Bodega Bay coast 25 years ago, he planned to get his name in the Guinness Book of World Records by surfing the Pacific Ocean every day for 28 consecutive years.

Now, well beyond his 9,000th straight day spent skimming across the icy waters, Webster's feat of dogged determination has earned him national attention in the New York Times and Surfer Magazine.

Webster, who learned years ago that Guinness does not recognize surfing records, has taken his passion for surfing in a different direction -- Santa Rosa City Hall.

Five years ago, he began promoting an idea he said would cleanse the Russian River of the billions of gallons of wastewater the city poured down the river and into the ocean each year. His concerns about possible pollution forced him to abandon one of his favorite surfing spots near the mouth of what he calls the ``Flushing River."

``It seemed too dangerous to continue surfing there with all the wastewater and septic systems that leak into the river," he said.

So in 1995, Webster, whose weathered face, disheveled look and untamed hair gave him an Einstein-ish appearance, unveiled a proposal he said would end the city's search for a wastewater disposal solution and save the city hundreds of millions of dollars.

He was joined by fellow surfer Don Martin, husband of Assemblywoman Virginia Strom-Martin, D-Duncans Mills, in the creation of an idea they

called Project 7.

“There are seven letters in (Luther) Burbank, seven letters in redwood, we celebrate Arbor Day on March 7. All these sevens kept coming up,” reasoned Webster.

Webster outlined their simple plan -- plant a 500-acre forest of thirsty redwood trees, flood their roots with billions of gallons of wastewater year-round, and the city's quest for a way to dispose of treated effluent would be over.

The trees would gulp up all the wastewater and in about 60 years the seedlings would have grown into a towering forest of valuable lumber that could be harvested and turn a billion-dollar profit for the city.

But Project 7 got a reception cooler than the Pacific Ocean.

Webster admits he wasn't the ideal salesman for what many believed was, at best, a cockamamie idea.

“I was possibly the worst possible spokesman for my idea because of my looks, my background, my speaking ability,” he said, noting some saw him more as a “crazed surfer” than a person with a workable idea.

Webster, 51, lives in Valley Ford and is a custodian at Bodega Bay Elementary School. He has spent most of his life performing odd jobs to ensure that nothing would interfere with his surfing quest.

As he moved into the world of wastewater politics, Webster saw his surfing exploits as a way “to become recognized as an expert so that some day someone will interview me and listen to what I have to say.”

Santa Rosa officials largely dismissed Webster's idea, along with others, such as waterless incinerating toilets, as unproven methods of solving the city's disposal crisis. Instead, they chose to pump the wastewater 41 miles to The Geysers for injection into the steam fields there.

Before the city's decision, Project 7 gained only scant press mention, but it wasn't totally ignored.

Santa Rosa's Board of Public Utilities agreed to put up \$35,000 to test Webster's theory on a small plot of newly planted redwood seedlings and

a stand of mature redwood trees at Sonoma State University.

“I believe they did it so I'd stop complaining,” Webster said.

A utilities board member and leading Project 7 skeptic, Ross Liscum, said he went along with the study half-heartedly.

“I thought it was a far-fetched idea, but maybe there was something there. After all, in the scheme of things, we were planning on spending \$130 million on a disposal project, so what's another \$35,000?” he said.

Since the three-year study began in 1997, Webster has continued his bid to surf daily for 28 consecutive years -- a full lunar cycle.

A few weeks ago, the test results arrived to a mixed reaction.

Webster said the results prove he was right.

The city says they prove he was half right.

The tests showed the mature redwoods sucked up wastewater at rates two to three times that of pasture lands and farm crops and, more importantly, continued to do so during the wettest months of winter.

Winter is the most critical season for Santa Rosa. That's when crop and pasture irrigation is impossible, forcing the city most years to discharge billions of gallons of effluent into the Russian River.

“It shows what I wanted it to show,” Webster said of the test.

Carolyn Dixon, a nature resource specialist with the city, half agreed: “It does seem like it works, but there are other questions.”

City officials say Project 7 might work for tiny community wastewater systems, but using redwood trees to absorb the millions of gallons of wastewater processed each day at Santa Rosa's sewage treatment plant would be a virtual impossibility.

It would require planting thousands of redwood trees over hundreds of acres of the Santa Rosa Plain and the installation of an underground irrigation system to supply the trees with wastewater.

Even if that is deemed feasible, Dixon said, “the Santa Rosa Plain is an oak woodland habitat. They (redwoods) do not belong there.”

Liscum said that given the politics of timber harvesting, Santa Rosa would face an even bigger problem if the trees grew large enough to cut.

“You won't be cutting down redwood trees in 60 years because you'll have people sitting in them,” he said.

Despite the city's decision to opt for The Geysers, Webster's belief in Project 7 remains undeterred.

The same is true of Bob Rawson, a former wastewater treatment plant operator with the county who is one of a number of experts Webster and Martin relied upon to formulate their idea.

Rawson is involved in a small-scale, Project 7-like operation at the Graton sewage treatment plant, where more than 400 redwood, cypress and Douglas fir trees were planted in a nearby 15-acre meadow last year.

Once mature, Rawson expects the trees and other agricultural irrigation will soak up the entire 140,000 gallons processed daily by the plant.

“The beauty of the system is it doesn't require a whole lot of infrastructure. The infrastructure is the trees,” Rawson said.

Webster said some of the concepts he and Martin used to formulate Project 7 had been discussed earlier by a Santa Rosa man named Dale Wright, who Webster calls “the father of the idea.”

“Maybe we should have called it the Wright Idea. Maybe then it would have caught on,” Webster mused.

You can reach Staff Writer Mike McCoy at 521-5276 or e-mail at mmcroy@pressdemocrat.com.

PHOTO: color by Christopher Chung/Press Democrat

MAP: b&w by Press Democrat; Wastewater experiment at redwood grove
Dale Webster came up with the idea to feed wastewater to redwoods to see if the thirsty trees could help solve the problem of wastewater disposal. The silver patch on the redwood tree covers a mechanism that measures the rate at which the tree takes in water.

Infobox: PROJECT 7

* The proposal calls for the planting of a 500-acre forest of redwood

trees.

* Their roots would be flooded with billions of gallons of waste- water year-round.

* The trees would gulp up all the wastewater and in about 60 years the seedlings would have grown into a towering forest of valuable lumber that could be harvested and turn a billion-dollar profit for the city.

Keywords: WATER WASTE RIVER POLLUTION BIOGRAPHY

On Friday, December 8, 2006, at 03:25 PM, Scott Couch wrote:

> Thank you for your comments. They will be taken into consideration.

>

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>>>> Dale Webster [REDACTED] 12/8/2006 11:13 AM >>>

> Just a short note to say:

> your plans for a poly million dollar sewer system are NUTS!

>

> and a system the uses Redwood trees to soak up waste water is a much

> better idea

>

>

> This is what a waste water system that works looks like in Graton

>